

# **First Things First Position Statement Re: Funding Requests in Response to State Budget Cuts**

## **Current Issue**

State tax revenues have severely declined. As a result, state funding for critical safety net services to families with young children has been reduced, or in some cases eliminated. As young children and their families feel the impact of state budget cuts, there are those who are looking to FTF to replace the state funding cuts to safety net programs that benefit young children.

## **First Things First (FTF) Background**

By approving First Things First, Arizona's voters decided to:

- 1) Invest in coordinated, evidence-based strategies to improve early learning and health outcomes for children.
- 2) Support those strategies through a funding source that is dedicated to ensure investments in early childhood and health services avoid the bureaucracy and politics that are part of the annual state budget process.

By law, FTF funds are to be used to expand access to and increase the quality of early childhood development and health programs. This includes, but is not limited to: improving the quality of early care settings, including the professional skills of early educators; expanding access to preventive health services and early screenings to identify developmental delays or health conditions; and expanding family support programs such as early literacy, nutrition and parenting skills. FTF also works to coordinate early childhood services statewide and to improve public awareness of the importance of early childhood investment.

## **Position Statement**

Dollars approved by Arizona voters to support the strategic approach of FTF should not be diverted to fund safety net services that historically have been funded by the state because:

- 1) It is the responsibility of the state to fund basic safety net services.
- 2) Doing so goes against the will of the voters who approved FTF.
- 3) There is no incentive for state elected officials to replace reduced appropriations as tax receipts begin to increase.
- 4) All FTF funds are committed to Arizona communities who – through their FTF regional partnership councils – already have decided what is best for their local children and families.
- 5) FTF annual revenues – currently decreasing at a rate of 8 percent or more per year – are insufficient to replace the safety net responsibilities of the state.

## **Conclusion**

Continuing on the path of quick fixes and fragmentation does not solve the state budget crisis nor does it place Arizona and its children in a competitive posture for the future.

FTF will not divert funds to replace state budget cuts for basic safety net programs.

FTF funds will be used to provide quality early childhood development and health services so all children can start school healthy and ready to succeed. When they succeed, Arizona succeeds.